

ISSUE 25 | FALL 2024

WILD RHODE ISLAND EXPLORER

MEET THE
PILEATED
WOODPECKER!



DEM
RHODE ISLAND



DID YOU KNOW?



We do a lot of work to protect, conserve, and learn about Rhode Island's wild creatures and the places they call home. None of this work would be possible without the help of people who hunt and fish in our state. Hunters and anglers buy a license each year. This license means that they promise to follow all the rules of hunting and fishing in Rhode Island.

These rules exist to protect our important natural resources and make sure that people can enjoy hunting and fishing in our state forever. Also, the money from these licenses goes towards important conservation work in Rhode Island.

There's another really cool way that hunters, anglers, and also target shooters (people who may not hunt, but practice their aim with firearms or archery at a range) help with conservation all across the United States. The businesses that make firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, and fishing equipment pay a tax on these items. This raises millions of dollars, which is split up and given to each state by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

What do we do with all this money? We use it to help our state's fish and wildlife! This money helps to buy more land for our management areas, which means more habitats will be protected in our state forever. We also use the money to do important research to learn more about our fish and wildlife, and what we can do better to help them.

Much of our work wouldn't be possible without the help of our hunters, anglers, and target shooters. By participating in these types of outdoor activities in a responsible and safe way, you can help support fish and wildlife conservation in Rhode Island too!

CONTACT US

RI DFW FIELD HEADQUARTERS

277 Great Neck Road
West Kingston, RI 02892
401-789-0281
DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov

RI DFW EDUCATION CENTER

1B Camp E-Hun-Tee, Exeter, RI 02822
401-539-0019

DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

24-hour Violation Line: (401) 222-3070

RIDEM



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO LEARN MORE!

Facebook:

@RIFishwildlife

Instagram:

@ri.fishandwildlife

YouTube:

Rhode Island Department
of Environmental
Management

HABITAT CHAT

Dead Trees are Animal Homes!

Trees are full of life! Fresh green leaves feed caterpillars and deer. Birds and squirrels build their nests in the branches. All sorts of animals eat tree seeds, like maple seeds, acorns, hickory nuts, beech nuts, and pinecones. Animals love to eat fruit from trees like wild black cherries.

But what happens when a tree dies? It loses its leaves and looks a little spooky. Some people might think dead trees are ugly. Do trees stop being a home or making food for wildlife once they die? No! Dead trees are also full of life!

A dead tree is called a **SNAG**. Snags come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. As the snag rots away over time, the wood becomes home to critters like ants, carpenter bees, centipedes, millipedes, slugs, and more. These animals love to hide in the decaying wood. And when there's bugs, you can expect to find animals looking for a bug buffet! Woodpeckers and other birds love to search dead tree bark for food. Eventually, the tree will fall over and become food for insects and mushrooms. Then, it will become a part of the soil again to feed a future tree.

Snags also have lots of holes, both big and small. A hole in a tree is called a **CAVITY**. Birds like barred owls, bluebirds, wood ducks, chickadees, woodpeckers, wrens, and many more love to build their nests in cavities. Bats like the eastern red bat and northern long-eared bat tuck themselves into tree cavities or hide under pieces of cracked or peeling bark. Raccoons, fisher, and squirrels all seek shelter in tree cavities. Great blue herons love to make their big stick nests in dead trees in swamps.

In our state's Wildlife Management Areas, you might spot a bunch of snags. Our habitat crew leaves them out there on purpose because dead trees have an important role to play in the amazing web of life! Have you spotted a snag out in nature? Next time you're outdoors, see if you can find one!



MADDIE'S OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

THE HISTORY OF FUR TRAPPING

Today, we are here with RIDEM Furbearer Biologist Morgan Lucot to talk about the history and importance of trapping! A furbearer biologist studies animals with fur, like beavers, foxes, and raccoons. They learn about where these animals live, what they eat, and how they behave. Their job is to make sure these furry animals are healthy and happy in their homes, and to help protect them and their habitats.



"Trapping animals means setting up special, safe devices to catch animals so they can be studied, moved to a better place, or used for their meat or fur!

A long time ago, Indigenous people in North America trapped animals for their fur, which they used for food, clothes, and ceremonies. This tradition is still practiced today, and knowledge of these skills has been passed down through generations.

When Europeans arrived in the 1600s, they started trading fur with Tribal Nations. This trade shaped American history. The money from the fur trade helped build cities and fund early American colonies.

The fur trade lasted about 250 years. It ended because European fashion changed and too many animals were trapped. Today, fur trapping is still done in a safe way with a lot of rules to protect animals and the environment. In Rhode Island, animals like beavers, minks, and raccoons are part of this tradition. Beavers, for example, have special fur that keeps people warm and is used in clothes and even in some perfumes!"

The Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife teaches people about safe and legal trapping through classes like Fur Trapping 101. In these classes, people learn about the history of trapping, how to use traps safely, and the biology of animals.

If you're interested in learning more, check out more courses at www.dem.ri.gov/outdoored.



About the Author

Hi everyone! My name is Maddie. I am the administrative assistant at the Outdoor Education office. I have the best job ever because I encourage people to go explore the great outdoors! I love to practice archery, learn about wild game animals (turkeys are my favorite), go fishing, and cook up seafood with my family! I did not grow up in a hunting family, so I relied on RIDEM Hunter Education programs to learn and to connect me with awesome mentors who helped me get to where I am today. I am still learning and growing, and now I am here to help you do the same!

CRITTER CAM

About our trail camera study:

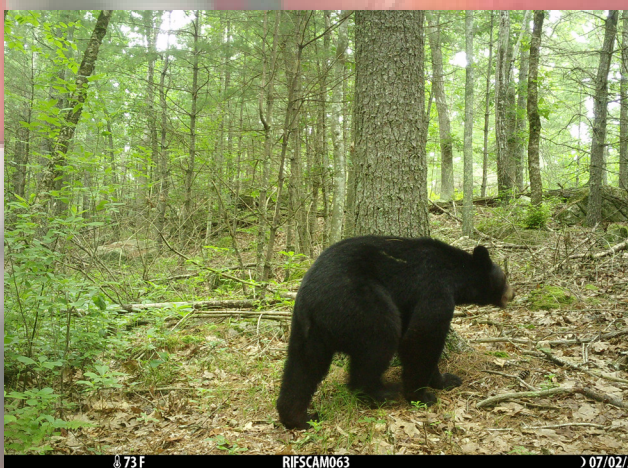
A trail camera is a small, waterproof camera that can be strapped to a tree. It takes photos when it senses something moving in front of the lens. In this issue, we'd like to highlight some photos from our research partner Laken Ganoë. Laken just graduated from URI with her PhD. Congratulations Laken! For part of her project, Laken used many trail cameras to figure out where fishers are in RI. She also put tracking collars on them to see what habitats they are using and how much they travel around. Laken's cameras captured some pretty awesome photos of fishers and other critters too!



Hi there, pileated woodpecker! It looks like this guy is interested in finding some delicious bugs in this rotting log.



Is this bobcat doing yoga?! Nope, it's just giving itself a bath! If you have a pet cat, you probably recognize this pose!



Remember, bears are out and about all the way into November! They will even stay active a little later if temperatures stay warm. Bears eat a lot in the fall to build up fat to survive the winter. Birdseed is a favorite bear snack. If you like putting up a bird feeder in the winter, maybe wait until the end of November.



Ready...pounce! A fisher dives down into the leaves after a mouse or another small critter.

"SMELLS FISHY" NEWS

ALBIE FEVER & BONITO BONANZA

Fall can be an exciting season in Rhode Island. Tree leaves turn beautiful shades of fiery auburn and sweet yellow. It's time to pick apples and a Halloween costume. It's also an exciting time to go saltwater fishing! Autumn in New England is when false albacore and bonito **MIGRATE** north. They are powerful swimmers that travel in big **SCHOOLS** up to 40 miles per hour! These speedsters live all over the world but can be found off the Atlantic coast from the Gulf of Mexico to Nova Scotia in Canada.

While they're a part of the same family and look very similar, they are two separate species. Bonito have silver bellies and a blueish back. They have black vertical lines on their sides. And, they have sharp teeth! The false albacore has a silver belly with hues of more greenish blue on its back. They have squiggly black markings on their sides. False albacores don't have sharp teeth like bonito do. Anglers often catch one species searching for the other, so it's important to be able to tell them apart.

These fast fish are tough to catch. They zip around chasing smaller bait fish that follow tidal currents. For false albacore and bonito, finding them is half the battle. Many shore anglers only get one or two opportunities to cast at schools of false albacore or bonito for a couple of minutes during each tide. You can catch them from shore, but you need patience and a bit of luck!

The most common way to find these speedy schools of fish is in a boat or kayak. Anglers might launch their boat where multiple schools can move through quickly. They might also head out on the water and chase schools of fish and cast out before the school moves through. Most anglers look for large feeding frenzies, called a **BLITZ**, where they can spot fish feeding.

False albacore and bonito have very keen eyesight and are very picky. To catch them, you must reel in your lure or fly as fast as humanly possible. If you are lucky enough to catch one of these blue and green racers, get ready for a fight! Once hooked, these fish zoom off, pulling line off your drag at lightning speeds.

False albacore and bonito don't stick around for long. Many anglers catch "albie fever" in the fall, feeling super excited and determined to head out and catch one of these awesome fish!



About the Author

My name is Harper, and I love fish! I was born in Rhode Island, but I have lived all over from Pennsylvania to Maine. Fishing has taken me many places, from the spruce highlands of Nova Scotia to the stunning peaks of the rolling Wasatch Mountains in Utah. My passion has led me to study marine science at the University of Maine, and upcoming fisheries and aquaculture at the University of Rhode Island. I love being able to connect with a world that I otherwise would not be able to see, and traveling has brought me many amazing experiences and memories.

OUR WILD NEIGHBORS

PILEATED WOODPECKER

HABITAT

Pileated woodpeckers live in **MATURE** forests with large, old trees. In Rhode Island, you can find them in forests with pine, maple, and beech trees. They can also be found in younger forests where there are large, dead trees or logs on the ground. You might also spot them in a neighborhood with large trees.

FOOD

A pileated woodpecker's favorite food is carpenter ants! They also love other insects that can be found in rotting wood like beetles, termites, caterpillars, cockroaches, and grasshoppers. They also will eat wild blackberries and elderberries, and berries from sassafras, dogwood, and holly trees. They even eat poison ivy berries! They might also visit your birdfeeder in the winter to eat seeds or suet.



Gerry Krausse

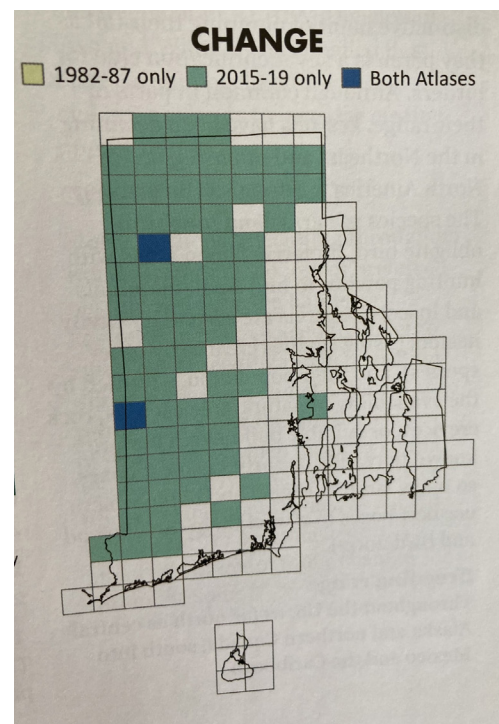
BREEDING

Pileated woodpeckers build their nests in old, dead trees. The male woodpecker uses his sharp, strong beak to dig a hole in the shape of a rectangle in the tree trunk. This is called a nest cavity. The woodpecker carves out the inside of the cavity and tosses out all the wood chips. Some of the wood chips will be used to line the nest. Pileated woodpeckers do not use grass or twigs in their nests like other birds. The cavity can be 10-24 inches deep. It can take a pair of pileated woodpeckers up to 6 weeks to make their nest cavity! Pileated woodpeckers lay up to 5 eggs. They mate for life and work together to raise their chicks.

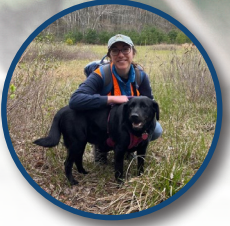
DID YOU KNOW?

Pileated woodpeckers have become more common in Rhode Island over the past 10 years. Our forests in Rhode Island have changed over time. We have more old trees in our forests now.

Check out this cool map from the Rhode Island Breeding Bird Atlas! This was a big project done by volunteer birdwatchers in the 1980s and then again in 2015-2019. Blue squares on the map show us where pileated woodpeckers were found in both time periods. The green squares show us new places where these birds were found. The map is mostly green, which tells us that our volunteers saw a lot more pileated woodpeckers in 2015-2019 than they did in the 1980s. It's important to study wildlife over time. We can learn a lot! Thank you to all of our Bird Atlas volunteers for helping collect this information!



OUT IN THE FIELD



Hi everyone! Mary here! Fall is the beginning of the hunting season, which means it can get pretty busy here at the Fish and Wildlife office. One of the most popular hunting seasons is the ring-necked pheasant season. Here to talk about pheasants is our upland game bird biologist Lizzi Bonczek!

Mary: Hi Lizzi! First, what is an upland game bird?

Lizzi: Hi Mary! There are two parts to the name “upland game bird.” An UPLAND bird is a bird that lives in grasslands or forests. A GAME bird is a bird that is allowed to be hunted. Upland game bird species can be different in each state, but here in Rhode Island we consider mourning doves, American woodcock, turkeys, and ring-necked pheasants as upland game birds.

Mary: Pheasant season is almost here, which is very exciting for a lot of Rhode Island’s hunters. For those who have never heard of this bird, could you explain a little bit about the ring-necked pheasant?

Lizzi: Pheasants are upland game birds that are native to Asia and were brought to North America in the 1880s. They like thick, but open habitats like grasslands, fields, brushy areas with lots of bushes, and forest edges where they can hide from predators. They have very good eyesight to watch out for predators. When farming was more common in the early 1900s, pheasants flourished in Rhode Island and coexisted with other species without outcompeting

them. Pheasants are a very popular game bird because of how tasty the meat is.

Mary: What is “stocking?” Why do we stock birds?

Lizzi: Over the last 100 years or so, a lot of Rhode Island farmers stopped farming. Farms were sold and more houses were built. The habitat pheasants relied on decreased and pheasants vanished from the state. STOCKING is a practice in which we put out farmed pheasants for hunters to harvest so that they can bring the meat home to their families. These farmed pheasants react to hunters just as wild pheasants do and can outsmart even well-trained dogs! Unfortunately, here in Rhode Island we don’t have the habitat needed to sustain wild pheasant populations, but by stocking pheasants on our Wildlife Management Areas hunters can still enjoy harvesting and eating these prized birds.

Mary: How do you prepare the habitat before the pheasants are stocked?

Lizzi: I work with our habitat biologist to maintain certain fields as pheasant fields. We plant native



grasses so that pheasants can hide. We mow fields every few years in the winter to keep invasive plants and woody shrubs from taking over the field. We have started using controlled fire, which cycles nutrients back into the soil and removes the top layer of mulch so that sunlight can reach the soil and encourage the growth of new grasses and wildflowers.

Mary: Do any other animals like pheasant habitat?

Lizzi: Lots of animals love grasslands! We plant a mix of grasses and wildflowers that are used by bees, butterflies, and other insects. There are also a bunch of birds that depend on grasslands such as bobolinks and grasshopper sparrows. Many animals also use EDGE habitat. This is the area where the grassland meets up with the forest. Bobcats are an example of critters that love edge habitat!

Mary: What's your favorite part about your job?

Lizzi: My favorite part of my job is getting to be outside and exploring all the natural areas in Rhode Island!

Mary: And lastly, what is your favorite wild Rhode Island critter?

Lizzi: My favorite Rhode Island critter is the common eider! They are a duck that spends most of their life out on the ocean and the males have beautiful coloring! A good place to see them is around Beavertail State Park in Jamestown and Brenton Point State Park in Newport.

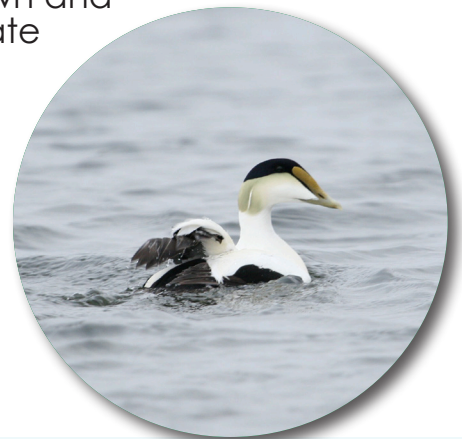


Photo: Jay Osenkowski



ABOUT LIZZI

Lizzi grew up in central Massachusetts and knew from a young age she wanted a job involving the outdoors. Following college, she traveled around the country from the tundra of Alaska to the marshes of Louisiana working with ducks. Lizzi got her PhD from Louisiana State University studying the breeding ecology of mottled ducks, a non-migratory duck that looks like a female mallard. In her spare time, she enjoys reading and training her two dogs, Lou and Millie (pictured here).

WILD QUEST

Word Search

As you read this season's magazine, you might notice some **HIGHLIGHTED** words.

Can you find them in this word search?

Snag
Blitz
Migrate
Schools
Mature

Cavity
Game
Upland
Stocking
Edge

S	R	I	N	A	T	V	O	H	D	T	C	E	T
L	O	U	R	C	O	E	S	O	S	D	I	T	C
M	M	A	T	U	R	E	D	C	N	L	C	A	I
M	G	I	I	S	U	E	U	E	A	E	M	R	B
T	A	O	G	U	P	N	I	P	G	S	G	G	M
S	C	H	O	O	L	S	Y	A	L	N	I	I	G
E	G	A	M	E	B	D	O	E	I	A	A	M	K
S	U	O	T	A	O	N	E	K	L	S	N	E	G
U	T	C	G	K	A	E	C	M	D	S	I	D	V
G	A	R	T	C	N	O	M	D	A	N	G	G	L
A	D	E	I	E	T	Y	Y	M	A	D	C	E	D
R	C	N	I	S	G	R	A	L	K	C	G	G	M
R	S	D	V	G	G	V	H	B	L	I	T	Z	S
I	I	E	R	I	I	C	A	V	I	T	Y	T	A

CRITTER CARDS

Rhode Island is home to many different wild animals. Some are very common and easy to spot. Others are rare and hard to find. Some are doing great and have healthy populations, while other species are threatened or endangered. At the Division of Fish and Wildlife, we've created a list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (marked as SGCN on the cards). We focus a lot of our work on helping these species. We do this by studying their populations, protecting special habitats, and spreading the word about these cool critters.

Cut out and collect these Critter Cards to learn about Rhode Island's wildlife species!

Cut

Fold in half

UMBER SHADOWDRAGON (SGCN)



10

Unlike most dragonflies which can be quite colorful, I am a mostly brown dragonfly with huge eyes. My big eyes help me to hunt the bugs that I like to eat at dawn and dusk. I live near fresh water throughout Rhode Island.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Agencies like RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife help me by protecting wetland habitats. You can help protect wetlands too by keeping them clean of trash and chemicals!

Nina Briggs

PILEATED WOODPECKER (SGCN)



16

I have a beautiful red triangle feather pattern on top of my head. I am a large woodpecker similar in size to a crow. I like to eat carpenter ants and other bugs. I create rectangular shaped holes in trees to be able to get these yummy bugs!

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

By helping to preserve the mature forests that I call home, you can help to keep my habitat protected for years to come.

OYSTER TOADFISH (SGCN)



8

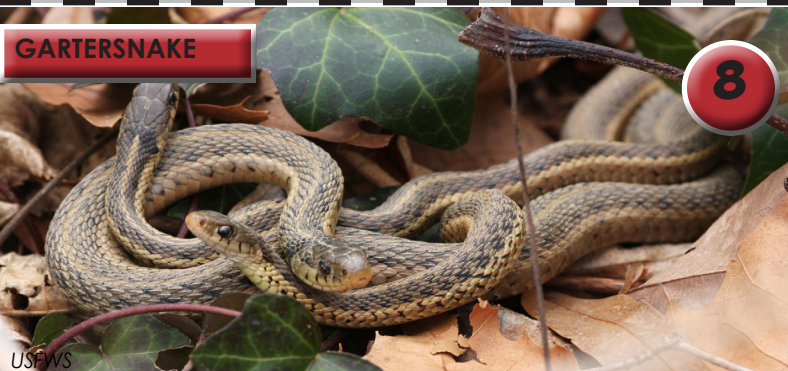
I am a grumpy looking fish that camouflages well in the rocky bottoms of the Narragansett Bay. I like to eat crustaceans and mollusks. Be careful if you ever catch me as I have a venomous dorsal fin! If you hold me incorrectly, the venom from my fin will feel like a bee sting.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

Overfishing can impact my population as I am part of the bycatch (fish that are not planned to be caught by fishermen). By encouraging political leaders to create more rules for bycatch you can help to protect me.

Robert Jon Golder

GARTERSNAKE



8

I can be found all over Rhode Island, although I am quite shy. I have yellow stripes that line the length of my body just like an Eastern Ribbon Snake. The best way to tell us apart is that I do not have a white mark in front of my eye. I love to eat all kinds of prey including toads, insects, snails, small fish, and sometimes mice.

WHICH ACTIONS WILL HELP ME?

I help people by keeping insect and rodent populations in check. Please tell family and friends that snakes are important to a healthy ecosystem! While I am very cool to look at, remember that I should never be removed from my natural habitat.

USFWS

This issue of Wild Rhode Island Explorer is a special one – it's our 25th issue! We understand that some of our readers may feel like they have outgrown the Explorer since they first signed up. (Although, your friendly Wildlife Outreach team think this magazine is great for all ages!) Some readers may have also moved to a new address.

If you'd like to update your address or cancel your subscription, please send an email to

mary.gannon@dem.ri.gov.

Thanks for reading and caring about wildlife conservation in our state!



RI Department of Environmental Management
DIVISION OF FISH & WILDLIFE
Great Swamp Field Headquarters
277 Great Neck Road
West Kingston, RI 02892

